

SOUTH WEST VOICE

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Lamentations as herdsman attack Ondo communities, wreak havoc

- Rape women, burn farmlands, threaten farmers
- Ajowa monarch abducted
- Cows feed on 30 hectares of cassava at Igbaroake
- Go back home, Amotekun begs sacked residents
- It's still risky, residents tell govt

By Dayo Johnson

AKURE — AFTER months of peace experienced by farmers across Ondo State, some marauding herdsman returned to wreak havoc in many communities across the state.

Recently, three communities were sacked by the rampaging herdsman in Ijagba, Imoru, and Arimogija in the Oso Local Government Area of the state.

The state government evicted the marauding herdsman from its forest reserves in 2021.

Recall that Governor Rotimi Akeredolu had issued a quit notice to the herdsman in all the states Forest reserves and asked those yet to register to do so forthwith.

Akeredolu, who issued an executive order to vacate all forest reserves, also placed a ban on night grazing and movement of cattle within cities and highways in the state and outlawed under-aged grazing of cattle.

The executive order was given in 2021, but the activities of the herdsman resumed late last year when reports of attacks and killings took place across the state.

However, it seemed that the governor's threat has been rebuffed by the herdsman, who returned to wreak havoc in the state.

Ijagba, Imoru and Arimogija residents were sacked by herdsman, threatened.

The latest attack led residents of Ijagba, Imoru and Arimogija communities to flee over an incessant attack by suspected herdsman which left tales of sorrow in their wake. The herdsman warned them to vacate their farmlands peacefully in their interest. A local, who spoke with Vanguard in confidence, stated that the armed bandits have been

terrorizing them for months, despite reporting them to security operatives.

The community member said: "They have killed so many of our people who are farmers on their farms and burnt their crops."

"Our farms which contain yam, maize, cassava, and other crops were destroyed by their cows."

"In some cases, they abducted farmers and demanded ransom before their release."

"They have instructed us to vacate our farmland for them and many farms have been taken over by these bandits. They will move into houses to rape and kidnap. They collected huge sums of money before they released their victims, who have since fled the community."

"These incidences have forced residents of the communities to flee to neighbouring towns and villages. The fear of further attacks, kidnap and rape of our wives and daughters by the herdsman, have created tension and anxiety within the community."

It's risky returning home now
—Residents

Another resident of the community, who identified himself as Adedeji, said: "Though those still around have told us that they have deployed security operatives including Amotekun to the communities, we still live in fear. Going back can't be that early, it's still risky my brother."

"Nobody wants to fall into the hands of these killer herdsman. What's happening is very unfortunate."

"These people are daring and they've asked us to vacate our farmland for them. So we are still not safe going back."

"We're still studying the situation."

"Many homes have been vacated following the anxiety that had en-

veloped the three communities."

Herdsman kill 3, burn houses in Melenge village

Unfortunately, residents of Melenge Village in Ose council area of the state still live in fear as suspected herdsman attacked the community.

On their way back, some men suspected to be herdsman suddenly opened fire on our men in an unprovoked attack. We have gone into the forest and we have addressed the situation

killed three people and set some houses on fire. Melenge is an agrarian settlement along Elerinla and Arimogija and one of the troubled spots in the Ose/Benin axis.

A resident of the village told Vanguard that the attackers swooped on the village alleging that the herdsman were infuriated by the villagers' refusal to allow their cows to graze on their farmlands.

The marauding herdsman reportedly mobilised themselves, attack the community and set their farms on fire.

According to him, the villagers took to their heels and scamped for safety when the marauders unleashed terror on them.

He said: "They destroyed our crops. If you see what these herdsman have done to us, you will weep for us."

Ajowa monarch abducted

But weeks after the residents of the three communities in Akoko were displaced, the monarch of Ajowa, the Olosa of Oso Ajowa, Oba Jimoh Omoola, was abducted.

He spent 10 days in captivity.

Other monarchs in the neighbouring communities in Akoko, contributed the ransom before he was released.

The residents of Ajowa community in Akoko North West council area of the state, have sent and SOS to the state government on the need to curb the unending criminal activities of herdsman in their community. The spokesperson of Ajowa community, Mr. Jaco Adegoke, said: "Our experience in the hands of these criminals in the last two years is unimag-

inable. They have killed, maimed, raped and kidnapped our people."

"Our people live in fear; our farmers are afraid to go to the farm for fear of being killed or kidnapped."

"Our wives and daughters do not follow us to the farm again for fear of being raped or killed by the herdsman."

Cows destroy 30 hectares of cassava at Igbaroake

The activities of herdsman did not stop there as another 30 hectares of cassava farm in the Igbaroake area of the state, belonging to the former Information and Orientation Commissioner, Dr. Eddy Olafeso, were destroyed during the week.

The cassava farmland, estimated at over N10 million, according to the farm manager, Adeola Ariyo, was uprooted and given to the cows to feed.

Ariyo said: "The cows turned the 30 hectares of land into a grazing field. The herdsman destroyed the entire farm and destroyed our means of survival. The incident was reported to the office of the Amotekun Corps."

The owner of the farm, Mr. Olafeso, who is also a former National Vice Chairman of the People's Democratic Party, PDP, lamented the invasion of his farm by the herdsman.

He said: "The pain inflicted on the family and the millions of naira lost can only be imagined. Our sweat for over one year was taken away just like that."

We'll continue to prevent encroachments — Ondo govt

Reacting to the renewed herdsman onslaught, Akeredolu's Senior Special Assistant on Security Matters, Alhaji Jimoh Dojumo, admitted that the state government was having a hectic time flushing out the herdsman from border towns and neighbouring states.

Dojumo said: "The state government has been flushing out the herdsman who attack communities in the state which shared borders with neighbouring states. Their tactics are that they sneaked into the border towns and communities, operate and sneak back unnoticed."

"Now that we've known the way they operate, the state government will tackle them squarely."

"We would not rest on its oars until the residents of the communities in the state that shares a border with Kogi and Edo states can have rest."

"We are not relenting; we will continue to ensure the safety of our people in the border towns and communities. We shall continue to prevent these herdsman from further encroachment from neighbouring border states."

Amotekun reacts

Also reacting, the state commander of Amotekun, Chief Adetunji Adeleye, said that his men were attacked at Melenge during their intervention. Adeleye said: "Our men were informed that some nearby villages in Melenge have been taken over by herdsman while they burnt down some people's properties."

"On their way back, some men suspected to be herdsman suddenly opened fire on our men in an unprovoked attack."

"We urge the people of the community to go back to their homes as peace has returned to the village."

"We have gone after the rampaging herdsman. We have gone into the forest and we have addressed the situation."

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